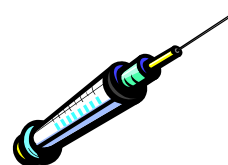


Tetanus Vaccine

What is the tetanus vaccine?

The tetanus vaccine is a shot that protects you against the disease tetanus. Tetanus is caused by bacteria called *Clostridium tetani*. These bacteria live everywhere in the outdoor environment, especially the soil. The bacteria can enter your body through a break in the skin, such as a cut.



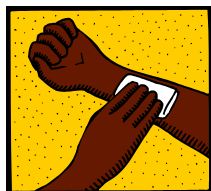
Tetanus is often fatal, particularly to older adults and young children. Powerful poisons produced by the bacteria cause the muscles to contract uncontrollably in spasms. Tetanus is also called lockjaw because the most common symptom is tightening of the jaw muscles.

Most people are first immunized in childhood by a three-in-one vaccine, referred to as DPT, covering diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough). After childhood a booster shot for diphtheria and tetanus is needed every 10 years.

It is important to check the date of your last booster whenever you have a dirty cut, animal bite, or puncture wound. If the wound is dirty or involves rusty metal and it has been more than 5 years since your last tetanus booster shot, or if you do not know when your last booster was, get another shot within 3 days of getting hurt. Try to get the shot the same day as the injury if possible. If it is not possible to get the shot within 3 days of the injury, get it as soon as you can. If you are not immunized, the bacteria multiply quickly if they become trapped in your body under a wound that has healed over.

Why should I be vaccinated against tetanus?

Tetanus is a rare but often fatal disease. There are about 100 cases of tetanus each year in the U.S. Of all people who get tetanus in the U.S., about one in three die.



It is impossible to avoid the cuts and wounds that commonly occur during everyday life. The tetanus bacteria can enter the body through

these breaks in the skin and cause a very serious infection. For this reason, it is very important to keep your tetanus shots up to date.

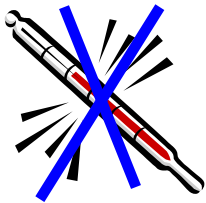
What other things should I know about tetanus shots?

Complete a three-shot series if you were not given the vaccine during childhood. The second shot is given 4 to 8 weeks after the first, and the third shot is given 6 to 12 months after that. You then need a booster shot every 10 years.



You can get a tetanus shot at your doctor's office or at most local health departments.

Side effects from the shot can include temporary soreness and swelling in the arm where you got the shot. Fever is rare.



Do not get the shot if you have a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher. However, you can have the shot if you have a mild cold or other minor illness. If you are sick, you might want to discuss your illness with your doctor before getting the shot.

Do not get the shot if you are allergic to thimerosal (a mercury derivative that is a preservative), or if you have had an allergic reaction to a previous tetanus shot.

For more information on adult immunizations, contact:

National Coalition for Adult Immunization
4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 750
Bethesda, MD 20814
301-656-0003

You can also get information from your local health department.

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